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Major U.S. Decision Is Awaited

Conferences Cloaked In Secrecy, but Word Is Possible Tonight

Official Washington yesterday wrapped itself in one of the tightest cloaks of secrecy ever seen in peacetime while key policymakers worked out a major international decision they were forbidden to discuss.

At the White House and the State and Defense Departments, officials refused to confirm or deny reports published in The Washington Post yesterday that Cuba is the focus of the extraordinary operation.

A welter of rumors rippled the usual Sunday quiet of the city. It was variously speculated that the security wraps concealed a new United States move on Cuba, a new turn in the Berlin crisis, or an early Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting to deal with one or both of these.

Only one thing was certain: that the Kennedy Administration was taking unusual steps to shield from public view the decision it is preparing.

Assurances were given by informed sources that no new major step would be taken during the next 24 hours. This raised the inference that perhaps by tonight the Administration would break its silence, possibly with a presidential declaration or notice that on

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Invasion Plans Denied

It was denied on all sides, however, that any invasion attempt to try to topple the Cuban regime of Premier Fidel Castro is in the making. Officials refused to confirm or deny, however, whether some new and intensive pressure on Cuba, perhaps in the form of threat, warning or ultimatum, is being readied.

While Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson was on his way back from Honolulu yesterday—officially because of a "cold"—there was no indication that congressional leaders had been briefed on current developments or had been summoned to the White House. A leading Democratic Senator, reached outside the city, said he believed "something popping," but was not sure what it was.

Ambassador to the U. N. Adlai E. Stevenson, it was learned, was among the officials asked to stay on in Washington yesterday for consultation.

Shipping Order Prepared

It has been known for some time that the United States is preparing to issue an order tightening the American quarantine on shipping to Communist Cuba. The current mysterious air in Washington, however, presumably involves more than that.

Both Cuba and Berlin have been topics in recent top-level American-Soviet talks here and in Moscow. Although the United States has denied that there can be any direct connection between the two, there is an obvious inherent connection: the pressure which the Soviet Union is exerting against Berlin, and its military aid to Communist Cuba, both endanger vital U. S. interests.

If Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev meets with President Kennedy, by way of a Khrushchev visit to the United Nations or otherwise, it is inevitable that both issues will be discussed.

Reports of Big Missiles

What the Kennedy Administration says it is determined to do before then is to demonstrate its resolve to stand fast and face up to risks where this Nation's vital world interests are at stake.

President Kennedy has served public notice that the interests will be at stake if Cuba obtains a military

capability which can be used against the United States. In that event, the President has said, the United States will react accordingly, alone, if necessary. Similarly in Berlin, the United States has said, it also will act alone, if need be, to preserve basic Western rights.

Silence on Troop Moves

There have been unconfirmed reports that Cuba may be acquiring from the Soviet bloc medium-range missiles and 10 Ilyushin-28 twin-jet light bombers, with a range of up to 1000 or 1400 miles. Defense Department sources, however, have reiterated that there is still no evidence of "offensive weapons" of any nature in Cuba.

On the international scales, Berlin weighs much heavier than Cuba, even though most Americans are more excited by Cuba now. But an example of firmness over the Soviet bloc buildup in Cuba may be regarded by the Kennedy Administration as a necessary means of convincing both Castro and Khrushchev that the United States is prepared to fight, if necessary, to preserve its vital interests. The way in which this will be demonstrated may well be the heart of the temporary Washington mystery.

Firm Stand Taken

There were stringent controls yesterday on information of troop movements across the United States. Ordinarily the information is readily available.

The Los Angeles Times reported that all military bases checked on the West Coast responded to inquiries by referring them to the Pentagon.

At Twenty-nine Palms, Calif., all members of the Marine 3d Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion on weekend pass were ordered back to their base as part of a "readiness" test. At Camp Pendleton, Marine officers declined to confirm or deny whether 2500 Marines were placed on alert for transfer to North Carolina and the Caribbean, as reported Saturday.

All these movements, Pentagon sources said emphatically, were unrelated to any military action involving Cuba. What was confirmed at the Pentagon was that there is a buildup of U. S. air defense forces in the Caribbean and negotiations to reconvert to

military use the airfield at, to rest as much as possible

As the Soviet Union is helping Cuba to build its military and economic capacity, and reportedly has sent 5000 military technicians to Cuba, any U. S. move or threat to Castro's proclaimed Communist regime might bring on Soviet repercussions. This in turn could involve West Berlin, the most significant and exposed Western outpost in the cold war.

Berlin Experts Present

It was noticed yesterday that State Department officials engaged in the discussions behind closed doors included experts on the Berlin crisis.

Observers trying to analyze the mysterious behavior were obliged to speculate, however, that because Berlin is such a potential East-West flashpoint, it seemed unlikely that the Administration would risk any move to endanger the Allied position there.

The specific atmosphere of secrecy prevalent in Washington includes, but also antedates, the visit by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to the White House and the State Department last Thursday.

Usually reliable sources reiterated yesterday that Gromyko's talks with the President and with Secretary of State Dean Rusk took no novel turn and left the Berlin crisis in its familiar state of deadlock. Other sources also repeated that no sudden element of added crisis was uncovered in the talks last week in Moscow between Soviet Premier Khrushchev and U. S. Ambassador Foy D. Kohler.

At the height of the Washington mystery of secret activity, President Kennedy followed an outwardly normal schedule in a brief appearance in public.

Apparently recovered from the cold which, it was announced, had caused him to cancel five speaking dates in the Western United States during the weekend, the President and Mrs. Kennedy attended church yesterday. They went to the 10 a. m. mass at St. Stephens.

Mrs. Kennedy on Friday night had interrupted her weekend at Middleburg, Va., and returned to Washington.

White House Press Secretary Pierre Salinger said the President was examined yesterday morning by Rear Adm. George Burkley, assistant White House physician. He found the Chief Executive's blood and temperature normal, said Salinger, but wanted him

Callers at White House

It was not disclosed how much rest the President did get, for there were several unidentified official callers at the White House. Salinger, during the afternoon, was seen at the State Department with Robert Manning, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs.

Secretary Rusk was at his desk in the Department, and an unusual number of his top assistants were in their offices or in conference, including specialists on intelligence and European and Soviet affairs.

Newsman noted that, to conceal identification of Government staff officials entering the State Department, the regular registry of entries and departures was removed yesterday. It was replaced by small separate sheets of white paper for individuals to record their signatures.

At the Pentagon there was a similar buzz of high-level activity for a Sunday, and also an unusually tight-lipped mood.

Pentagon Visitors

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was on duty, and other officials who came in during the day included Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric, Navy Secretary Fred Korth, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Adm. George W. Anderson Jr., Chief of Naval Operations and Army Staff Chief Gen. Earle G. Wheeler.

Under way in the Caribbean area are large-scale United States maneuvers involving 45 ships and 20,000 men, including about 8000 Marines afloat and other Marines on the small island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, where landing exercises are scheduled early this week. Vieques is just east of Puerto Rico, which is east of Cuba.

Included in the fleet force for the exercises scheduled to run through Oct. 30 are the aircraft carrier Independence; the Randolph, which carries planes for anti-submarine warfare; two helicopter carriers, about 20 destroyers and other units.